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ALIENATION AND ELEMENTAL IMAGERY IN CAMUS AND WENDT

BY

© EVELYN ELLERMAN

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled Alienation and Elemental Imagery in Camus and Wendt submitted by Evelyn Ellerman in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

The sense of alienation from society, nature and self which is expressed by European existential writers like Albert Camus, in his first two novels, L'Etranger and La Peste, is unique neither to the period between the two world wars, nor to Europe. Writers like Samoan novelist Albert Wendt, in his three novels, Sons for the Return Home, Pouliuli, and Leaves of the Banyan Tree, have found existentialism an appropriate expression of the alienation they have experienced under colonialism. Although several critics have briefly noted stylistic and thematic similarities between Wendt and Camus, no extended comparative treatment of their work has been produced. However, a close examination of the five novels mentioned above reveals a consistent synchronic and diachronic pattern in the use of natural imagery by both authors that is closely associated with the degree of alienation found in their major characters. The natural imagery, especially that of the elements -- sun, moon, air, water -- functions barometrically in these novels, as a register of the internal emotional state of the protagonists. When they are most alienated from society and themselves, nature seems most out of balance; when the protagonists achieve full self-awareness and, optionally, a measure of social respon-

sibility, nature reflects that harmony. Furthermore, the changes in the alienation of the major characters are framed within the structure of the trial process. Each protagonist must undergo a public trial or judgement by society, as well as a personal trial, where he becomes his own accuser, his own accused. While the validity of the public trial is continually undermined, the judgement rendered by the individual against himself as a result of his own personal trial, holds the ultimate authority. The final success or failure of the character in this personal trial is consistently reflected in the final balanced or imbalanced state of the natural imagery. This functional pattern of imagery use in both Camus and Wendt, while interesting in itself, really provides a tool for the consistent analysis of character in the novels, especially problematic characters like Meursault in L'Etranger and Pepe in Leaves of the Banyan Tree.

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INTRODUCTION

Existential literature has long been regarded as a response to the decay of traditional myths and values in twentieth century Europe. It is the literature of alienation, where the individual is oppressed by society rather than sustained by it, and where that individual must discard externally imposed beliefs in order to freely discover his own. But western society has not been alone in experiencing crumbling social structures. Neo-colonial cultures around the world have undergone a double destruction of their central beliefs. First their native cosmos was shattered by western missionaries. Within one or two generations were nearly destroyed the rituals, myths and ceremonies that had bound people to their communities and to their surroundings for centuries. The term coined by the Samoans for the white man, "papalagi," literally means "heaven breaker," and describes perfectly the actions of the colonizer. He had broken through the solid wall of heaven, where it met the horizon, and in doing so, had irrevocably destroyed the authority of the Samoan cosmos. But the fabric of colonial society itself disintegrates when the colonized nations gain independence and face the concomitant tasks of establishing its individual identity and determining its cultural values.

It is not surprising then that the artistic response

to this alienation from both traditional and western values might be, and often is, existential. The Samoan novelist, Albert Wendt, creates fictional worlds in his three novels, Sons for the Return Home (1973), Pouliuli (1977), Leaves of the Banyan Tree (1979), where characters either try to assimilate the values of other cultures and fail; or where characters become so alienated from society that they must ultimately come to rely solely on themselves, or go mad. Wendt's personal experiences are typical of recent generations of neo-colonial writers. Rewarded for his early academic ability, he left Samoa to take up a scholarship in New Zealand, where he eventually completed a graduate degree in History. But the years of separation from his native Samoa and the experience of being an outsider in New Zealand left him feeling suspended between two cultures, needing to establish his own identity and his own values.

A similar artistic response to alienation had occurred among the generation of European existential writers who began publishing between the two world wars. Albert Camus was born and raised in colonial Algeria. His personal experience with alienation also took place early in life. Nominally the son of the ruling colonial power, he was excluded from fully participating in the benefits of that power by his family's poverty, while his nationality excluded him from the company of Arabs. In addition to this social alienation, Camus' tuberculosis, contracted at the

age of sixteen, isolated him from the world of healthy men. His two earliest novels, L'Etranger (1942), and La Peste (1947), are set in Algeria and explore the need for the individual to become self-aware and responsible for his own existence.

But for neither Wendt nor Camus is the achievement of consciousness enough. Each writer followed his first novel, where the protagonist struggles against society to obtain a measure of individual freedom, with a second novel focussed on achieving individual freedom as a preliminary step toward demonstrating social responsibility. In Wendt, this tendency manifests both as an attack on the existing Samoan leadership and as a model for the qualities necessary to good leadership. In Camus, it appears as an appeal for a love between individuals within a society that results in positive social action.

Albert Wendt has acknowledged his interest in Camus by including several references to Camus' work in his own fiction. The Samoan in Sons for the Return Home gives a book of Camus' essays to his girlfriend. And, as Helen Tiffin has noted in her article, " 'You Can't Go Home Again': The Colonial Dilemma in the Work of Albert Wendt," the final lines of Sons are a parody of The Myth of Sisyphus. In Leaves of the Banyan Tree, Galupo's library contains a copy of The Myth as well. In interviews, Wendt admits his debt to Camus (Beston 1977, 157), yet he also

refers to Borges, Dostoevsky and the Bible in his fiction, as well as stating that certain elements in his novels owe something to Kafka (Beston 157). Every author is influenced by his cultural environment. Germaine Brée says in Camus, for instance, that Camus formed much of his notion of the significance of plague from Artaud (116). Probably the most realistic appraisal of the relationship between Camus and Wendt comes from Subramani who suggests, in South Pacific Literature: From Myth to Fabulation, that Wendt is not just recognizing influence, but affinity and shared common knowledge (122).

These affinities have also been briefly noted by Helen Tiffin (126) and John Beston (148), but the many thematic and stylistic similarities in the work of Camus and Wendt deserve a more extended treatment. The overriding mutual concern of both authors is alienation: man's alienation from society, nature and himself, and this alienation is most frequently explored within the narrative framework of a trial.

The trial motif is a pervasive and complex one in the novels of Camus and Wendt. It provides a strong structural organization for many of the works. It serves literally and metaphorically as a source of irony and self-illumination for the reader and main character respectively. In the work of both authors the trial occasionally develops an allegorical significance that intensifies the

meaning of the surface narrative. But the trial motif, as a narrative vehicle, is most useful to Camus and Wendt in developing the theme of alienation. It focusses on the tensions that exist between internal and external values and, hence, on the importance of achieving balance as a resolution to alienation.

Both Wendt and Camus play on the several connotations of the term, presenting the "trial/procès" not only as the juridical arm of society but also as the intense, painful and personal trial of individual authenticity and resolve which can lead either to an advancement in self-knowledge, or to self-destruction. In each case of trial by society the author finds ample material for irony. Society's trials are revealed as the absurd embodiment of the dead, or harmful myths harboured by that society. The protagonist is never found guilty of the original accusation and is always sentenced to inappropriately harsh punishment. The trial becomes a grotesque caricature of justice, performing only one function: the de-humanizing of the defendents into scapegoats for society's paranoia. The procedure of accusing an individual of one crime, trying him as if in absentia, and convicting him of yet another crime, becomes a crime itself. In every case, the irony reverses the roles, and society is tried instead. And in fact, the arbitrary justice rendered by these trials is never accepted by the accused as relevent, for he must, in the work of both Wendt

and Camus, seek truth alone; he must become his own accuser, his own accused.

Consequently, the personal trial experienced by the protagonists of this fiction is the only valid one. This is underscored by its pervasive presence in the novels: it occupies the entire text, while the trial by society is normally dispensed with in a few scenes. In this personal trial, the individual must abandon the clutter of societal myth and tradition, abandon externally imposed values, and embark upon an inward journey to confront himself. This voyage to a new centre is painful and often deadly. The successful characters are the ones who courageously and honestly seek it, or who eventually open themselves up to it. The victory they achieve is the victory and responsibility of individual freedom, of self-determination and, of social responsibility. The unsuccessful characters are those who embark upon the journey for ulterior motives, whose courage fails, or who refuse even to begin.

That the trial motif fulfills a strong structuring role in this fiction has been noted by some critics. Germaine Brée has mentionned that the major characters in Camus all seem to be on trial (107-08), and Phillip H. Rhein's study, The Urge to Live, compares the use made of the trial motif by Kafka and Camus. However, no connection has been made in the criticism of either Wendt or Camus

between the changes in the degree of alienation experienced by the characters during the personal trials and the corresponding changes in the degree of chaos or harmony shown in the elemental imagery. Yet these correspondances, when examined over a number of novels and between authors, emerge as a functional pattern that can aid in the consistent analysis of the alienated characters. In previous criticism, failure to recognize this consistent functional pattern for the natural imagery in Wendt and Camus has resulted in a variety of contradictory interpretations. For example, the importance of the sun as an agent in Meursault's destruction in L'Etranger has been discussed by René Andrienne in the article, "Soleil, ciel et lumière dans L'Etranger de Camus." Andrienne sees Meursault as a victim of society's oppression, forced to act in ways that are unnatural to him. Yet the sun has also been seen as a symbol of male authority and part of Meursault's guilt in willing the death of his mother in Roland Wagner's article "The Silence of The Stranger." Neither of these explanations for the action of the sun occurs in the criticism of La Peste, even though the sun can be just as strong a force in that novel. And none of the positions which ascribe specific symbolic significance to the sun's seemingly malevolent action at key points in these novels accounts for those moments when the sun seems benevolent. Furthermore, in the Wendt criticism, the Pepe

character in Leaves of the Banyan Tree has been regarded as successful or unsuccessful on the basis of his death-bed statements, but with no regard for the consistent actions of the sun in connection with his alienation, or for its equally consistent action with other characters in the novel, or with characters in Wendt's first two novels, Sons for the Return Home and Pouliuli. Margaret Nightingale, for instance, in "Islands to Come," claims Pepe is a failure because he never manages to establish his own values, while Denis Hulston, in "A Note on Albert Wendt's Flying-Fox in a Freedom Tree," sees him as a success because he becomes his own judge.

What can be concluded from an examination of the role of the natural imagery is this: if the character's experience of a chaotic or destructive natural environment can be taken as a metaphor for his alienation from himself, a subsequent restoration of harmony and balance in nature can indicate reconciliation with self. This focalization is, moreover, peculiar to that character; other characters in the narrative do not experience these shifts in natural balance as he does. Finally, this restoration of natural harmony can be understood as prerequisite to reconciliation with society.

The values vary and the system is not rigid in the work of either Camus or Wendt, but their use of natural imagery is remarkably similar. Nature, principally sun

(and its variants light, fire and heat), night (and its variants dark, cold and shadow), air (wind), and water (and its variants sea, rain, pool, stream), functions not only as a register of the conscious emotional state of the protagonist, but as a register of the internal, and often unconscious, conflict he suffers as he attempts to repress, or refuses to confront, the totality of existence. When the individual seems most alienated, nature itself seems most out of balance: the sun burns everything to ash, the gentle sea breeze becomes a hurricane. It can be argued, furthermore, that this is a sensitizing of nature not the personalizing that occurs in pathetic fallacy. In the work of both authors, nature itself is always indifferent.

The approach taken in this thesis deals, then, not with assigning specific symbolic values to sun, night, wind and water, but with ascribing a kind of general barometric function to the elements in a manner similar to that described by Anna Balakian in her essay "Alienation and Aridity." One of the advantages in taking this approach is that prior to the final scene, all scenes depicting a seemingly benevolent nature can be readily interpreted as a kind of "recess," or "time-out," in the proceedings of the personal trial. They are a false ending in a process which must, nevertheless, be carried to its conclusion. Instances of these recesses occur in all the novels under discussion: Tarrou and Rieux

take time off from their battle with disease in La Peste to go swimming in the sea; the Samoan and his girlfriend in Sons for the Return Home park their car on a sunny hilltop to enjoy the view of a city where they can never belong; in L'Etranger, Meursault forgets death for one day as he watches the ongoing life of Algiers from his balcony, on a warm, sunny day; Faleasa, in Pouliuli, goes fishing in the sea to be one with nature in the middle of the battle with his family; and, in Leaves of the Banyan Tree, Pepe tries to forget his hatred for Tauilopepe by creating new friendships in the shade of the Vaipe market. At these moments the awful imbalance of nature seems to recede; this is when the character ceases to question, or search for the truth, or when he tries to convince himself that all is well. As these are only recesses in the trial, they do not contain the climax of the plot. The bathing scene in La Peste, for example, cannot form the central event in the development of self-awareness for the citizens of Oran, since only two citizens go bathing as a relief from their duties, and since the elements continue to oppress the town afterward.

However, the main advantage of adopting this barometric model is that it emphasizes the whole notion of balance. And in the fiction of both Camus and Wendt, it is the success or failure of the characters, during their personal trials, to establish harmony with themselves and

with nature that remains central to interpretation. In "The Artist and His Time," Camus tells us that he does not "choose the moment when we are beginning to leave nihilism behind to stupidly deny the values of creation in favor of the values of humanity, or vice versa. In [his] mind neither one is ever separated from the other and [he measures] the greatness of an artist...by the balance he managed to maintain between the two"(1955,150). This concern with balance is obvious in Wendt as well. In a 1978 interview with Jim Davidson he says, "all my work oscillates from complete affirmation to complete self-destruction"(114). A balance must be achieved by the character; he must have restored order to his universe in order to have won the case. In the following thesis I intend to look at success or failure to achieve this harmony, as it is reflected in the elemental imagery, in two novels by Albert Camus, L'Etranger, and La Peste, and in three novels by Albert Wendt, Sons for the Return Home, Pouliuli, and Leaves of the Banyan Tree.

CHAPTER ONE -- THE WINNERS

The dialectic between winners and losers in the novels of Camus and Wendt examined here is most easily discovered through the values ascribed to night and day. For both Camus and Wendt, these values are roughly equivalent. The potential for success in their characters lies in a willingness to embrace night. These are the characters who engage in self-examination: for them night represents wholeness, the natural, the healing, the sensual, and the individual. It is at night that the full play of the senses is possible, as the eyes can no longer dominate perception. It is at night that the individual can retreat into healing silence to know himself and his past.

The characters who are unwilling to embrace the night have a different understanding of its qualities and possibilities: for them, the night represents the unknown, the unpleasant, the sinful, and the dangerous. Daylight, for a "night" person, can be just as unpleasant and frightening; if he is resisting the inner quest, consciously or unconsciously, daylight can represent the artificial and the destructive, the disorienting, the communal. When these characters are out of balance, they are often blinded, made sleepy or dizzy by the daylight: they become lost in the labyrinth of social exigency, unhappily controlled by or

controlling others, or pursued by a sense of betrayal. On the other hand, the "day" people are content to accept society's values: they become powerful and self-assured in daylight. When these characters can no longer function within those values, they, too, become threatened by daylight, losing their orientation.

Often, in order to make these values clear, the authors make use of allegory. Minor characters in all the novels represent the ideal "night" or "day" people. Night people are those who are in touch with their true selves: in Wendt, these are always Samoans, like Lupe and Fanua in Leaves, who have not accepted papalagi ways and who are still in contact with the land; in Camus, these are characters, like Rieux's mother in La Peste, who live contentedly in the shadows and alleviate human suffering.

Day people are interested in the exercise of power or in the maintenance of the dominant social order; they refuse introspection, are divorced from nature and cling solely to the values of society. In Wendt these characters are most often Samoans who have opted for papalagi life, like Malaga in Pouliuli, or the white man himself -- the lawyer Ashton in Leaves, for example; in Camus, day people represent the values of society as does the examining magistrate in L'Etranger, or Dr. Richard in La Peste.

Of course, few characters in the novels are so clearly allegorical. Both authors make use of the duality

of nature to maintain tension within the personalities of their main characters and within the plots themselves. The main characters all have pre-dispositions towards night or day, but because of the imbalance in their own world, are often shown to be suffering in that world, or struggling feebly in its diurnal opposite, drowning in the air, unable or unwilling to find a balance. Only the arrival at internal balance makes both night and day habitable for the succesaful characters -- it is the way to win the trial.

Three of these winners will be examined in this chapter: the Samoan from Sons for the Return Home, Meursault from L'Etranger, and Rambert from La Peste. To varying degrees, each of these characters begins from a position of ambivalence towards society's values; that is, at the beginning of the narrative, they are each alienated from society, nature, or themselves to some extent. However, the differences in the narratives of their trials results from the degree of both their alienation and of their reluctance to seek self-awareness and social responsibility. The measure and force of this alienation is indicated by the degree of imbalance demonstrated in nature.

Sons for the Return Home begins in the rain, an indication of a fundamental change of internal emotional state in all Wendt's novels. The Samoan sits in the university cafeteria gazing out the window at a spring storm. Throughout his exiled school years in New Zealand, he has

managed to disengage himself, to some degree, from both papalagi and Samoan society by retreating into the neutrality of silence. But he is about to graduate, his family will soon be returning to Samoa, and he must make a decision about his future -- Will he go or stay? It is a painful decision and one he will not willingly make. His mood is reflected back to him by what he sees: "The window-pane was blistered with raindrops; he watched them as they slid, like peeling strips of skin, down the glass"(2), and the pressure building up within him by the "wall of storm clouds shifting ponderously down towards Eastbourne and the harbour"(3).

The disorientation felt by the character is further underlined by the exchange of land for sea, a kind of synethesia of worlds where one world is described in terms of another. This is a technique developed by Wendt, and used frequently, to indicate invasion of one world by another. The Samoan seems to gaze out through the window-eye as a wounded fish would, while down in the harbour, he sees "a passenger liner ...ploughing a thin furrow of foam across the dark blue waters"(2). Later in the novel, when he learns of his girlfriend's pregnancy, their mutual fear and disorder is again represented by an exchange of worlds:

> For a long time they walked in silence towards the railway station, past gaping shop windows flooded with blaring orange light, oblivious of the people passing by like fish in some dimly opaque sea. (128)

His refusal to participate or to enter the trial procedure is clearly shown in his initial refusal to respond to the girl's physical advances and, when she finally asks him several questions, his answer is a monosyllabic, "No." It is only when he is alone in bed at night that he decides to start seeing her. This must be seen as an attempt on his part to avoid the internal search for self-awareness; he hopes to adopt the myths and values of the dominant society through ties with one of its accepted members. It is a betrayal of self. His defensive silence shattered, "he heard a renewed surge of rain hitting the roof of the house. The sound reminded him of the patter of rats' feet"(4).

The importance of this self-betrayal at night cannot be ignored. The Samoan has, in effect, opted for the alien daytime reality of his white girlfriend. The rest of the novel documents the trial of this crime. For society, he has unforgiveably crossed racial barriers and must be punished through exile. Personally, he realizes only gradually that he has been avoiding self-examination in courting the papalagi myth and, subsequently, the faa-Samoa myth, the myth of traditional Samoa.

In a way this betrayal at night becomes a betrayal, or invasion, of the night. As the Samoan walks through the city streets at night with his girl, they pass by the "cold blazing lights of the shops"(10). He tries

unsuccessfully to assimilate by attending a party given by her white friends. He is furious with their bigotry, but says nothing. As he leaves the party, "the starless sky seemed to press down on the car as it rushed headlong into the neon lights of the city, pursuing tram rails that glittered like knife blades"(24). The artificial lights and metallic violence of the papalagi have invaded the Samoan cosmos. The sky presses down on the betrayer as his shame presses down on him. The invasion of one world by another is highlighted again by the image of the girl's home at night, the "ultra-modern house was brightly lit; it looked like a ship stranded on the side of the hills. All around it stood a wild profusion of native trees"(36). Perhaps the clearest portrait of this betrayal is the nighttime landscape viewed by the couple from their car on a hill overlooking the city:

> Below them lay the city and suburbs of Lower Hutt, a shimmering expanse of lights twinkling in the gloom. Beyond that, the dark harbour, and, billowing up to the dim sky, the hills of Wellington, glittering like gigantic Christmas trees which had fallen over. (39)

Although the Samoan has tried to embrace white culture, in the form of the girl, it is obvious that he is uncomfortable with his decision. In an effort to wrench himself away from her, he purposely goes home with a woman who picks him up on the bus. His revulsion is obvious as he watches her admiring herself in the mirror and

"caressing her sagging breasts, white like stale milk in the light"(18). While his girlfriend and parents actively enjoy the Wild West myth found in American movies, the Samoan is bored by it, thinking it pretentious. And at the Samoan dance they attend, he notes that the musicians all play amplified guitars: "their dark suits and ties...reminded him of a row of wet magpies he had once seen on a farm fence"(61).

No matter how much the Samoan tries to appropriate papalagi culture, he is constantly reminded that it is not his. He first makes love to the girl during an evening "which had risen from the harbour as though it had been born out of the sea's depths"(20). He thinks he feels harmony at last after all his years of alienation, but they have made love on top of a papalagi grave and are haunted throughout their relationship by the ghosts of her former white boyfriends.

During the Samoan's summer job as a postman, the girlfriend helps him deliver the mail, while he jokes that New Zealand is a reserve of white natives and he is their black missionary. But it is really her country, and her culture. He fears he will lose her as he watches her:

> the sparkling light swam up from the road and footpath and made her hair look as if it was burning....her bare feet danced through the streams of light on the footpath as she ran. (47)

On their Christmas holidays, he even reluctantly

attempts baptism in a New Zealand river, but he is obviously the foreigner. It is the girl who knows the names of the plants, who knows the way to the riverside, and who willingly dives naked into the river, while he self-consciously lags behind. As they make love in the water:

> She stretched and flowed around him, the sun trapped in her eyes as she gazed up into the sky, her head flung back lazily into the water, her hair swirling round her face and shoulders. She was the river itself with all its rhythm and weaving and turning and pull. (84-85)

Even the New Zealand darkness has become alien to him. He gets up in the middle of the night to sit by the dying fire; when she gets up to join him, he says "he couldn't sleep because of the beat of the river, the silence, and the strange sounds of the bush. He was afraid of it all"(85).

The fruitlessness of his love affair with the sun culminates in a scene where his illusions are literally shot to earth. He awakens at dawn and is drawn to a hill overlooking the girl's family homestead. He feels he is becoming one with her landscape, but as he climbs to the summit, "the sun, now half over the hills, blinded him"(93). As he stands there, the Samoan becomes fascinated by the flight of a hawk above. The bird seems to hover perfectly between two worlds, beautiful yet dangerous, "the sunlight caught in its talons"(94). While he gazes admiringly at the physical embodiment of his own desires, the girl

shoots the hawk with her rifle. As he sees the hawk fold and plummet "like a fist" from the sky to the gully, he is unconsciously witnessing the death of his courtship of papalagi culture.

From now on, the Samoan begins to sense his difference from the girl. His disaffection and inner turmoil become clear as they enter a lava plateau; he is moved by its silence:

> Why was it that he was always attracted to desolate places, he wondered. To places like this plateau, fashioned by volcanic eruptions, weighed down by the sky wild with the threat of rain and lightning, scarred by rivers to expose wounds of red volcanic soil which bled in the rain, covered over wide areas by thick volcanic ash, with everywhere protruding thick outcrops of lava rock, clenched fists threatening the sky? Perhaps it was because such places reflected the truth of the human heart. (106)

The Samoan is attracted to the wild, elemental nature of the lava, while the girl's concerns are more domestic. Her eyes are focussed down a gorge which led past some poor farms to the family cottage at the edge of a lake. She remarks that all the lava plateau needs to make it into good farm country is cobalt, and:

> all he could see in his mind was a sea of lush grass creeping across the Plateau, suffocating even the bare lava rock outcrops and surging up the mountains to smother the sky. (108)

He thinks that "there was need of desolate places, deserts, tapu [holy] areas...where the mind and heart could find solitude -- the sacred fire that warmed and made the self

whole again"(108).

This ascent to an area of New Zealand ruled by the natural elements, marks the waning of the power of the light imagery surrounding the Samoan's courtship of papalagi values. After the couple arrive at the cottage, the Samoan's perception of the light has begun to change. He watches the girl as "she stood at the window looking out at the lake. Caught in the bright light of the hot afternoon sun, she looked brittle, very vulnerable"(115). When she discovers she is pregnant, she tries to discuss her problem with her mother, but receives no support from her; the daylight is no comfort either: "The air was chilly, the sun caught behind a thick mattress of grey cloud"(130). She decides to have an abortion and mistakenly tries to convince herself it is a good choice:

> The air and the darkness and the lights of the city and suburbs pressed in around her, breathing heavily, threateningly. It was as though the country itself didn't want her to have his child. (131)

Later, she cannot bring herself to tell the Samoan what she is going to do. Her doubt and confusion mingle with his as the sun and inanimate objects around them become sharp and dangerous:

> in the brittle light they [the rose bushes] looked like pieces of modern wire sculpture that you could cut your hands on. The glasshouse looked as if it had been carved out of an iceberg. Above everything, the sky was tense, with fists of cloud tinted yellow by the morning light. They could feel the

> first cold fingers of winter groping into the pores of their skin. (149)

In one of the many recesses from the trial, the girl postpones telling him the news by asking him to go for a drive. As they travel faster and faster, she relaxes again, "the sunlight dancing wildly on the surface of the road ahead"(149). They drive to the hill where they had first parked and gaze out over the city:

> They felt as if they owned it all, even the lazy sky stirring contentedly above it. A breathing light seemed to be growing out of the city itself, out of the very buildings that had reminded him of tombs before he had met her. When she remarked that the city was beautiful, he agreed with her. (150)

He, too, is trying to convince himself that everything will turn out all right for them.

But it is only a recess, and as they walk through the city, they enter an old Roman Catholic cathedral. Here again, the Samoan feels the allure of secure values. If papalagi society does not fill his need, perhaps papalagi religion will. He looks up as "huge stained-glass windows blazed hypnotically with all the colours of the rainbow....As he gazed at the Crucifixion he felt timeless, and capable of believing once again in God"(150-51). But when they are leaving, the unreality of this choice is born in upon him as he:

> glanced back up over his shoulder at the Crucifixion: the central figure nailed to the Cross, seemed outlined by flames; it seemed to detach itself from the window and float slowly towards him. He looked away quickly

> and hurried through the door. (151)

The girl tells him her decision while they sit outside on a park bench. He is stunned as he realizes he has lost forever his effort to assimilate papalagi culture. A complete cosmos has been wrenched away from him: "A strange numbness welled up from his lungs to clog his throat, ears, and head....It was as if...he had suddenly gone deaf"(153). He feels betrayed.

Intertwined with this misguided desire for acceptance into papalagi society is the Samoan's defence against the racist verdict levelled at their relationship by that society. It doesn't matter if he truly loves the girl; his crime is one of racial transgression, which is interpreted by society as moral transgression.

As she tests him one last time with an invitation to another party, he leaves his house to find:

> the night was chilly, a stiff wind was blowing in from the south, and the black starless sky echoed the fear he felt: for the first real time, he was confronted with the fact that he could lose her. (122)

When he arrives at the party he is at first refused admittance because of his skin colour. At the bar, a papalagi, "deeply tanned with the sun, with short-cropped blond hair and cold blue eyes," stares at him with a "flicker of contempt"(123). The Samoan recognizes the man as a:

> rugby player and surfie who, suffering from fear of his own inadequacies as a male,

> believed the racist myth of black virility, and who was now trying to convince himself (and his friends) that the myth wasn't true. (125)

The racial myths of both the New Zealanders and the ex-patriate Samoans are each destroyed in turn by Wendt in Sons for the Return Home. The girl's father tries to dissuade her from marrying the Samoan in a lecture on "moral decency, physical decency, financial decency"(141). But he himself has already proved to be a drunk trapped in a loveless marriage. Standing in front of a painting of the crucifixion set in New Zealand, he begins to invent a genealogical myth for their family. She cuts him short with "My grandfather was a thief....So were all those uncivilised, uncouth savages who came here from England"(142). No longer powerful, he looks "pale and vulnerable," as he finally accedes to her wishes.

The racial superiority claimed by the Samoan's parents is likewise shown to be ludicrous. His mother paints a picture of sunshine and light, love, prosperity, health and Godliness. Yet when he arrives in Samoa, the first thing the Samoan notices are the children, "rich with noise, legs spotted with sores, nose[s] running from daybreak to dusk, the grit and dust of life caught in [their] fingernails and bare feet"(171-72). The sun regains its power once more as he tries to assimilate another culture but, as he stepped out of the plane, "he

was blinded by the sun and began to sweat freely"(170). As he looks back at the plane, he has yet another feeling of disorientation, of being in the wrong world:

> Heat-waves were swimming off it, and it glittered in the light like a large metallic fish which had disgorged him onto the shores of a country real only in myth or fairy tale or dream. Beyond the airstrip, and reminiscent of backdrops in a Technicolor movie of the South Seas, palm trees rolled up to foothills; and beyond them stretched the high volcanic range, greener than anything he had ever seen. (170-71)

Alienated and discontent, the Samoan searches for solace in yet another myth, the family myth of his grandfather. It is this myth which comes closest to providing him with a valid pattern for his own behaviour and the possibility for reconciliation for himself. His grandfather, a healer, had been born prematurely during an eclipse of the sun, prematurely from a clot of blood, like the great lizard god, Pili. He frequently sought peace at night in the bush, where he would chant alone for hours. When he returned from these expeditions, he would be refreshed, and would rejoin family life. He would even accompany his Christian wife to church, though he would sleep through the service.

All his life he had been alienated from society, as though he were in another world. He was:

> a feared oddity in a tame ocean full of nominal Christian fish, eagerly pursuing the 'Light' but haunted by wrathful ghosts, insatiable gods who ruled the unfigleafed

> phallus, and by guilty memories of freedom and grace before the Fall -- white sailing ships bursting out of the sky with their voices of phosphorescent fear. (189)

He was too much a night person for his family, "too titanic a nightmare...darkness clung to him; he stank too much of the time before the coming of the Light"(190).

The Samoan's grandfather always planted his palm trees in a circle, the symbol of completion. When the grandson discovers his grave in the middle of one of these circles, he thinks that the grave itelf-"gave the circle of palms a feeling of completion; the centre, the axle of the wheel, was still there"(185).

From his father's stories, the Samoan begins to identify with the grandfather, to believe that the circles held an answer for him. But the father tells his son that the grandfather had shattered the circle through an act of betrayal. Suspecting his wife of infidelity, he tried to abort her baby and finished by killing both mother and child. The father explains that over the long years of their marriage, the grandfather had made her the centre of his circle and that this was an error:

> Perhaps it was because he had loved her too completely when he had not fully conquered his own fears and shadows and vanity as a man. We forget too easily what we are, and -- most of all -- the beauty we are capable of if we heal ourselves. There are no evil spirits or wrathful gods; we are, in the final instance, not victims of circumstance either. We are equal in our affliction and our guilt. We secrete the poison of that affliction. The cure is love, he said

finally. (208)

This revelation follows on the heels of the Samoan's own realization that his girlfriend "had killed their child, and he had helped her"(200).

Free now of the old values and naked in the acceptance of his own guilt, he leaves Samoa on the plane. He has achieved the balance he once envied in the hawk as "the plane was now fixed forever in [sic] placid timeless sea between his past and his future, and he had nothing to lose"(216).

While the Samoan in Sons for the Return Home offended society with his demonstration of love for someone, Meursault in L'Etranger offends society by his lack of demonstration. Both characters begin in seeming indifference: the Samoan has retreated into a shell that fends off the demands of both papalagi and Samoan cultures; Meursault has retreated into the safe existence of his monotonous working life. Yet there is a major difference between them. From the beginning, the Samoan decides to pursue those two estranged cultures, and is open to, if not actively seeking self-awareness. Meursault is confused about his own values in the face of death, and must be forced into defining and testing them by events imposed on him or that he collaborates in creating. Meursault's confusion, as he blunders up against established social values, results in violent inner tensions that appear as chaotic images in the North African landscape.

There are several indications in the text that Meursault's indifference to life is long-standing and has a probable cause. We learn that he was disappointed as a young man:

> Quand j'étais étudiant, j'avais beaucoup d'ambitions de ce genre. Mais quand j'ai dû abandonner mes études, j'ai très vite compris que tout cela était sans importance réelle. (64)

After this initial setback, Meursault resigns himself to life in a job which is below his capabilities, working with people who are his intellectual inferiors. Unlike Sisyphus, Meursault has always found dawn "l'heure la plus difficile"(22), because it means re-shouldering his burden, going to work; neither is he content with Sundays (with the freedom and consciousness of the descent down the mountain): "je n'aime pas le dimanche"(34). He even refuses a promotion to Paris, giving as his excuse that one life is as good as another. However, he later tells Marie that he had lived in Paris for a time, but had not liked it -- one wonders if Paris was where his education had been interrupted. In any event, Meursault is as unwilling to shift from his secure (if unchallenging) situation at work as he is unwilling to shift from his adopted (if untenable) nihilism.

Meursault has, in fact, been living a self-imposed internal exile. He has cut himself off from his society's myths (he thinks movies are silly and pretentious), and from other institutions. He has flattened the planes of his

existence, flattened the values on the canvas until all acts are the same as all other acts.

This is, of course, a zeroing of existence which is impossible to maintain within the strictures of society. Meursault's attitude has resulted in his failure to communicate with the one person he loves: his mother. So much affected by his indifference was she that she had simply sat and watched him while she had lived with him. It was only after she had gone to the Home that she could express her grief and then, finally, to show love to someone else. This love affair, so close to death, is confusing to Meursault, who has lived only for the sun and youth. And it is with her death, that Meursault's insulated world begins to crumble.

He must now face death for the first time in his adult life, and he is confused. Despite his contention that life is meaningless, he is confronted with a death that matters to him. He will not allow himself to grieve, yet when he returns from the funeral to hear Salamano weeping over a lost pet dog he had mistreated, Meursault says, "je ne sais pas pourquoi j'ai pensé à maman. Mais il fallait que je me lève tôt le lendemain. Je n'avais pas faim et je suis couché sans dîner"(61).

Meursault's so-called nihilism has been adopted unthinkingly by him in order to cover the pain of failure. His is an unexamined life; he later admits to his lawyer

that, "j'avais un peu perdu l'habitude de m'interroger"(94). Meursault does not consider himself guilty or innocent; he has been content to live day by day a purely physical existence in the sun, so much so that he claims, "que j'avais une nature telle que mes besoins physiques dérangeaient souvent mes sentiments"(94).

Since Meursault has convinced himself that life is meaningless, death is also meaningless. Yet the novel opens with a death that he must deal with. Death is one event that society has ritualized to such a high degree that it is almost impossible for the individual to assert his own values at any time during that rite. For probably the first time in his adult life, Meursault finds himself caught in a web of values which are not his own. He is disoriented and confused. As he is not given to introspection, he does not know why he feels this way, except to suspect that it has something to do with his mother.

The novel becomes, not only the narrative of his indictment by society for failing to comply with its rituals and values, but documents his ambivalence towards those externally imposed values and his testing and discovery of his own. These struggles manifest themselves in the imbalances in nature so much debated and discussed by Camus' critics.

We learn, then, that Meursault and his mother did not get on well and that Meursault, unable financially or

emotionally to support her, had sent her to the Home. Perhaps her death prompted the usual doubt and guilt suffered by children in these circumstances. For whatever reason, he feels compelled to seek approval for his actions from others. He does not want to accept guilt. When he approaches his employer for a two-day funeral leave, Meursault tells him, "ce n'est pas de ma faute"(10), and when he meets the Warden, "j'ai cru qu'il me reprochait quelque chose et j'ai commencé à lui expliquer"(11). However, so long as he observes the outer form, plays the game, society does not blame him at all. His employer is warm to him after the funeral and enquires "si je n'étais pas trop fatigué"(40). The Warden of the Home interrupts Meursault's explanation with "vous n'avez pas à vous justifier, mon cher enfant. J'ai lu le dossier de votre mère. Vous ne pouvez subvenir à ses besoins"(11).

The heat and glare which seem to attack him, then, are indications of his own uncertainty and feelings of guilt. He becomes sleepy on the way to the funeral and frequently dozes off during the vigil and ceremony, or feels dizzy and disoriented. He has no rest at nightfall, the lights invading even then, for the porter switches on the lamps "et j'ai été aveuglé par l'éclaboussement soudain de la lumière"(16). When Meursault asks the porter to turn off at least one of the lamps, he is told that they all have to be on, or none at all. Meursault is discovering that, with

this ritual, society expects total external compliance. He is expected to look at the body, expected to weep. If he fails in these observances, then he is guilty of callousness and impiety.

Meursault is pursued by a sense of unreality: everywhere he is reminded of death and judgement. He is revolted by the physical appearance of the old people at the vigil. Feeling threatened, he says, "j'ai eu un moment l'impression ridicule qu'ils étaient là pour me juger"(19). But this is again an indication of his disorientation as, at dawn, each of them rises and shakes his hand, "comme si cette nuit où nous n'avions pas échangé un mot avait accru notre intimité"(21).

This indication of acceptance momentarily reassures Meursault and he is further cheered by the porter's solicitous treatment of him. In the first recess of the narrative, he goes out into the dawn and is calmed by the morning breeze. He smells the cool earth and no longer feels sleepy. But when he is caught up in the ludicrous funeral procession, he is reminded of society's requirements and is immediately aware of the heat again:

> L'éclat du ciel était insoutenable. A un moment donné, nous sommes passés sur une partie de la route qui avait été récemment refaite. Le soleil avait fait éclater le goudron. Les pieds y enfonçaient et laissaient ouverte sa pulpe brillante. Au-dessus de la voiture, le chapeau du cocher en cuir bouilli, semblait avoir été pétri dans cette boue noire. (28)

Here is the first of several occasions where Camus introduces a kind of synesthesia of elements, in which the earth seems to liquify, or the sea seems metallic, or the sand to burn. Each time this technique is used, the character is undergoing some confusion of values similar to that described by Wendt as an invasion of worlds.

When Meursault returns home, having done his duty by his mother, he tries to resume his previous life, in still another recess from his personal trial. He sees his reflection in the mirror and thinks "que maman était maintenant enterreé, que j'allais reprendre mon travail et que, somme toute, il n'y avait rien de changé"(39). He spends all his spare time at the beach with Marie soaking up the sun and swimming in the sea. During these pauses in his personal trial, he feels he is in balance; he leaves his window open and "c'était bon de sentir la nuit d'été couler sur nos corps bruns"(42).

This interlude ends with Salamano's weeping in the night. Meursault's boss now suggests a move to Paris and Marie suggests marriage, two more major challenges to Meursault's insularity. These pressures are framed again by Salamano discussing his lost dog in juxtaposition with references to Meursault's "pauvre mère." The effect on Meursault is obvious. The next morning, as Meursault prepares to go to the beach with Marie, she remarks that he has "une tête d'enterrement," and when he goes outside,

the sun blinds him and strikes him "comme une gifle." Marie, however, thinks it is a beautiful day. Just as the Samoan's perception of the lava plateau reflected an affective state which was quite different from that of his girlfriend, Meursault's experience of the sun emanates from his particular emotional state, and is, therefore, not the same as Marie's experience.

Marie's joy allays Meursault's uncertainty for a time, but his pleasure in the day is compromised by Raymond's obvious interest in her. Ordinarily, Meursault's indifference would have insulated him from the concern this interest engenders, but his involvement with Marie and with Raymond has pulled him into communion with society and he is no longer sure of himself. As they stroll toward the beach through snow-white lilies, the sky glints like metal. Meursault begins to swing to the side of society's values. Shortly after they arrive at the beach cabin, he decides that he wants to marry Marie, whereas before, the marriage had not mattered to him at all. Later that morning, in another recess in the trial of his values, Meursault feels at peace floating with Marie in the sea on their backs beneath a benevolent sun.

However, as the men go for a walk on the beach, Meursault's doubts and confusion return. He has been planning marriage with Marie, all three men have also been planning to share expenses that summer, and he has seen the

Arabs -- all nature seems to be tinged with the promise of violence and time seems to stand still: "Le soleil tombait presque d'aplomb sur le sable et son éclat sur la mer était insoutenable"(78-79). The men can hear the metallic clink of knives and forks coming from the other cabins. As they walk, the Arabs come into view. Meursault has allowed himself to be placed in a position where he is controlled by others. The violence of his inner conflict is reflected in the violence of nature: "Le sable surchauffé me semblait rouge maintenant"(80). Meursault agrees to fight the Arabs for Raymond.

After this initial confrontation, Meursault wanders on to the beach again, this time alone; the elements become even more insupportable. Meursault realizes that Raymond's insistence on fighting with the Arabs could very well have involved him in murder. Paradoxically, his attempts to join society might result in the ultimate transgression of society's values. Approaching the Arab by the stream, Meursault is confused by ethical considerations he would rather avoid. He wants some peace and quiet and is tired of a contest he doesn't understand and wants no part of. Beyond the Arab he can see a cold, clear stream. Meursault wants to flee from "le soleil, l'effort et les pleurs de femme, envie enfin de retrouver l'ombre et son repos"(85). But he feels caught between Raymond's obvious desire to be rid of the Arab and the great "Thou Shalt Not"

of society. Either decision, to leave or to murder, would alienate him further from the society he has been uneasily courting. The Arab threatens him with a knife, with his own death, and Meursault's confusion reaches a peak. He fires the revolver as much at his predicament as at the man, but immediately realizes his mistake. He has ascribed meaning to life and death by defending one and causing the other. Meursault knows he has betrayed himself, "détruit l'équilibre du jour, le silence exceptionnel d'une plage ou j'avais étais heureux"(88).

Meursault is so disoriented he submits to the court trial and at first even admires the tidy way in which it is managed. However, the conflict between society's values and Meursault's own soon manifests, as the light and heat continue to oppress him. The sun beats in through the blinds and curtains of the courtroom and the heat makes him dizzy. He discovers he is not being tried for murder, something he can accépt, but for not loving his mother enough. In addition, his case is being confused with that of the parricide whose trial is to follow. Each time he is reminded of his failure to grieve for his mother he is again assailed with uncertainty. On Marie's only visit, he watches the neighbouring prisoner gazing mournfully across the barrier at his mother, a silent Arab woman, and Meursault feels that, "dehors la lumière a semblé se gonfler contre la baie. Je me sentais un peu malade et j'aurais

voulu partir"(108).

Gradually, though, as his physical self becomes more and more controlled by his jailers, he begins to turn to introspection. After five months in jail, as the sun is setting one day and the evening approaches, an hour "sans nom, où les bruits du soir montaient de tous les étages de la prison dans un cortège de silence"(115), Meursault tries to comprehend the reality of death. He remembers something the nurse had told him at his mother's funeral, that "il n'y avait pas d'issue," and he realizes that each man must face this alone, that "personne ne peut imaginer ce que sont les soirs dans les prisons"(116).

Increasingly he comes to dread the heat and disorientation of the days in court, and to fear the darkness, which reminds him of death. He notes that the anteroom of the court, where he is placed in waiting, "sentait l'ombre." The nights in his cell are filled with forebodings of "l'attente du lendemain." He longs for freedom, to erase the event that has deprived him of that freedom, and comments wryly, "comme si les chemins familiers tracés dans les ciels d'été pouvaient mener aussi bien aux prisons qu'aux sommeils innocents"(138).

Still resisting the notion of his own death, Meursault occupies himself in contemplating a reprieve. But he soon moves to a more balanced position of considering a reprieve for twelve hours and considering no

reprieve for the other twelve hours. He begins to sleep during the day and stay awake at night, inhabiting the night for the first time in the novel. He is at this point in his acceptance when he is tested one more time against society's values. The prison chaplain enters the cell and tries to get the atheist Meursault to repent. For the last time, the light shines on Meursault, but here it does not oppress him as he finally rejects all received values, embraces the totality of existence, accepting not only his own guilt, but that of the rest of society as well.

Meursault ends his narrative in complete harmony with himself and with nature. He sleeps, and when he awakens, stars are shining on his face. He can now inhabit the night as he had inhabited the day:

> Des bruits de campagne montaient jusqu'à moi. Des odeurs de nuit, de terre et de sel rafraîchissaient mes tempes. La merveilleuse paix de cet été endormi entrait en moi comme une marée. (171)

These examples of natural imagery from Meursault's public and personal trials demonstrate that, although the sun is the prime indicator of balance or imbalance in a character, other elements like wind, sea and earth can perform the same function, either in the same geographical location, or in another. If the elemental imagery is seen simply as an indicator of the character's emotional state, the difficulty of explaining the alternating chaos and

harmony from one place in the narrative to another, or from one narrative to another, is eliminated. The sky is not solely oppressive, nor is the sea the sole refuge; the elements are not independent agents forcing the characters to act against their will.

Indeed, a close look at the text often reveals, as with Meursault and Marie the morning of the beach party, that the imbalance in nature is perceived only by the character undergoing trial and that, always, some inner conflict can be adduced from the text which precedes that perception.

While L'Etranger deals with the inner conflict of one individual, La Peste presents an entire society forced into the same kind of self-examination, the same defining of values in the face of death. But this novel moves on to the next logical problem, which is the communion of individuals within that society. Both Sons for the Return Home and L'Etranger stopped at the beginning of the process, leaving their protagonists in balance with nature, but still alienated from society. La Peste outlines the struggle of several of Oran's inhabitants not only to achieve that balance, but to demonstrate love toward others as well. The character who is the most successful in this endeavour is Rambert, the Paris journalist.

By coming from the outer world, but suffering the same trial as the citizens of Oran, Rambert becomes everyman.

As Finel-Honigman, in her article, "Oran: Protagonist, Myth, and Allegory," and others have pointed out, the story of the plague at Oran has certain allegorical significance: it represents, on one level, the Nazi invasion of France and the reaction to that invasion. But the novel has a more universal level to it: Oran is anytown, anywhere, anytime, and Rambert is the average man who works, does his job, follows his own interests and has little consideration for such abstractions as "good citizenship." Like the average person in most societies, he is too comfortable to pursue self-awareness and must be jolted into the process. When asked by Rieux whether his paper would allow him to write the truth, Rambert says, "No." Rieux replies that he cannot help him in his journalistic assignment then, because he has decided to have no part of "l'injustice et les concessions"(23). Rambert says he understands, but does he? The journalist who is paid to investigate the lives of others, takes no time to examine his own.

The natural imagery in the novel confirms this notion of Rambert as everyman, for the sun, wind, and rain generally oppress or assuage the town as a whole and throughout the novel Rambert's reactions parallel quite closely those of the average citizens. He is at first uninterested in the plague, which is affecting only the poor. Later, when the town is closed, all he can think of is escape. When escape does become possible, he decides to

remain and perform what service he can for his fellow sufferers. Then, when he is re-united with his wife, he has an overwhelming sense that their relationship can never be the same again, but must be started afresh.

We are told that Oran has cut itself off from nature. It is a town "sans pigeons, sans arbres et sans jardins, où l'on ne rencontre ni battements d'ailes ni froissements de feuilles, un lieu neutre"(13). It is a town walled in from the continent of Africa and walled in from the sea. The only way the inhabitants can detect the passage of the seasons is by the feel of the air, the colour of the sky and the temperature of the sun. In the summer, "le soleil incendie les maisons trop sèches et couvre les murs d'une cendre grise," and in autumn, "c'est au contraire, un déluge de boue"(13).

This imbalance in nature is an outward sign of the alienation of the citizens of Oran from themselves and from each other. Their chief pursuit is commerce; their aim, to obtain wealth. So unnatural is their daily existence that they schedule all sensual pleasures for the weekend, when "ils aiment des femmes, le cinéma et les bains de mer"(14).

It is a town devoted to youth and power: physically dried up by the sun and spiritually dried up by its way of life. Comfortable in its continual search for wealth, unheeding of its past, Oran is not a place likely to inspire self-examination in its citizens. "Cette cité sans

pittoresque, sans végétation et sans âme finit par sembler reposante, on s'y endort enfin"(16). This existence is like slow self-destruction, a suicide of the soul.

The changes in nature, then, are made by the author to reflect the changes in emotional state of the people as a whole. They are doubly forceful because the rise and fall of the plague, the flourishing and destruction of an evil force, is also made to coincide with the natural cycle of the Algerian seasons. But always Camus introduces the imagery in juxtaposition with important shifts in the plot. Nature becomes, in this novel, as it had in Sons for the Return Home and in L'Etranger, not a convenient backdrop, but an extension of man's affective side, a visible manifestation of the turmoil or peace within.

In this way, the sickness that arrives in Oran is symbolic of the sickness that lies in the hearts of its people. It results from an imbalanced condition where only the artificial life of the town is valued. And it produces a corresponding imbalance in nature: in a city where nature never intrudes, we find a dead rat, then scores of dead rats. For the door-porter of Dr. Rieux's building, the appearance of the dead rat is scandalous. He, like the other inhabitants of Oran, at first tries to avoid the reality of death: "il n'y avait pas de rats dans la maison"(18). This denial is echoed by Rambert's protestation to Rieux that he should not be included in the

scourge because, after all, "je suis étranger à cette ville"(99). He does not want to deal with death; he wants to return to Paris where love awaits him instead.

In the following week the population begins to panic as thousands of rats die. It is as if nature itself has been infected by the sickness of the Oranians, as if "la terre même où étaient plantées nos maisons se purgait de son chargement d'humeurs, qu'elle laissait monter à la surface des furoncles et des sanies qui, jusqu'ici, la travaillaient intérieurement"(26).

In this novel, society is itself on trial -- the crime? -- man's alienation from nature, from other men, and from himself. At first, society is not even willing to admit there is a body in the room. Just as the door-porter had refused to admit there were rats in the building, the people will not admit there is plague present: "nos citoyens à cet égard étaient comme tout le monde, ils pensaient à eux-mêmes, autrement dit ils étaient humanistes: ils ne croyaient pas aux fléaux"(49).

The public convinces itself there is no danger. As the rat-deaths subside and just before the human-deaths begin, the population awakens to what feels like a new day, a breeze "déjà tiède soufflait dans un ciel bleu et humide. Elle apportait une odeur de fleurs qui venait des banlieus les plus lointaines"(32). On this day, Dr. Rieux reassured by a letter from his wife, "descendit chez le

concierge avec légerté"(32). But M. Michel, the door-porter, dies this day; the recess in the trial is over.

As people's apprehensions and confusion grow over the rising number of fever deaths, Dr. Rieux consults Dr. Richard, the chairman of the local Medical Association. Dr. Richard refuses to act until the Prefect acts. While the internal conflict progresses between that small part of society which recognizes there is a problem and the majority that wishes to ignore it, nature reflects the rising passions. On the day following M. Michel's death:

> de grandes brumes couvrirent le ciel. Des pluies diluviennes et brèves s'abbatirent sur la ville; une chaleur orageuse suivait ces brusques ondées. La mer elle-même avait perdu son bleu profond et, sous le ciel brumeux, elle prenait des éclats d'argent ou de fer, douloureux pour la vue. (28)

Then, like the abatement of a fever, or the recess in a trial, as the plague is not officially recognized by either officialdom or the press, the public decides that "nous avons d'autres chats à fouetter"(46), and blames the deaths on the weather. The public mind is reflected in "le ciel frais du printemps"(51), but from inside his room, Dr. Rieux, a minority voice, looks out the window and can think only of plague. Below him the town is happy once more. It seems to Rieux that "une tranquillité si pacifique et si indifférente niait presque sans efforts les vieilles images du fléau"(52). Rambert, the journalist sends a telegramme to his wife that says, "Tout va bien. A bientôt"(99).

After weeks of ambivalence, the authorities finally read a charge of plague against society and a quarantine is imposed. Now in jail, their physical existence limited to aimlessly roaming the confines of their streets, the people begin to worry in earnest. As in L'Etranger and Sons for the Return Home, the initial charge has little to do with the ultimate trial: the priest, Father Paneloux, calls a Week of Prayer building up to a Sunday sermon where he excoriates the people with their sins and lack of love for God. According to Paneloux, the plague is the result of their moral transgressions.

Once more, the natural imagery reflects the reactions of the people. As they nervously await the Week of Prayer which will invade their lives, the "marée d'invocations et de prières qui refluaient jusque dans les rues"(109), the weather changes. Their confusion is indicated by the loss of the sun and the beginning of a deluge: "le ciel s'était assombri, la pluie tombait à verse"(109). As the priest purposely plays on their fears invoking images of an angel of pestilence flailing them for their sins:

> la pluie redoublait au-dehors et cette dernière phrase, prononcée au milieu d'un silence absolu, rendu plus profond encore par le crépitement de l'averse sur les vitraux, retentit avec un tel accent que quelques auditeurs, après une séconde d'hésitation, se laissèrent glisser de leur chaise sur le prie-Dieu. (110)

The authority of this judgement is seriously

undermined by the snort, like an impatient horse, of a parishioner during the sermon, but for the short period of the service, the public accepts this verdict. However, as they leave, they notice that outside the rain has stopped, and by the next day, opinion is divided. Those associated with authority like, M. Othon, the magistrate, find Paneloux's arguments "absolument irréfutable." But for others, "la prêche rendit plus sensible à certains l'idée, vague jusque-là, qu'ils étaient condamnés, pour un crime inconnu, à un emprisonnement inimaginable"(115).

This sense of injustice, imprisonment and exile is finally born in upon the citizens of Oran. Some, like Rambert, begin to plot physical escape. Others seek mental escape in madness. In any event, no real escape is possible: the sun has made their days oppressive and the night (once lit reassuringly by thousands of streetlamps that dimmed the stars in the sky) has become a time for whispering ~~near the~~ few lamps that are still shining.

It grows unbearably hot in the days following Paneloux's sermon, as the citizens resolve to resist changing their habits for the plague. They go to work, buy quack antidotes, patronize restaurants in a desperate effort to avoid any change in their lives, any inward-looking. Rambert is among the most stubborn of these people who try to regain "leur bonheur et ôter à

la peste cette part d'eux-mêmes qu'ils défendaient contre toute atteinte"(156). This attitude continues into the fall through torrents of rain until two climactic events: Rambert's decision to stay, even though a sure method of escape has been found; and Paneloux's crisis over the Othon boy's death and his subsequent obstinate expressions of faith to a half-filled cathedral in the midst of a howling gale. His parishioners are silent; Paneloux's hold over them is broken and the trial of society for moral transgression has failed.

Only one further serious imbalance of nature is recorded, and this one is connected with the last plague death, Tarrou. As he succombs to the disease in Rieux's house, the mild weather is disturbed by hailstorms, rain and a wind that flaps the awnings wildly. Rieux compares Tarrou's metaphysical yearnings with the temporal desires of the rest of the people and remarks that for men like Tarrou there had been no answer. He had been looking for an abstract kind of peace, "mais il ne l'avait trouvée que dans la mort, à l'heure où elle ne pouvait lui servir de rien"(245). This death is placed in stark apposition to the life and joy experienced that day by the rest of the people.

Having faced death and fought death and shown love and compassion towards one another, Rambert and the other citizens gradually learn to live each day to the full. There

is no other place in the rest of the narrative where nature, as a reflection of society's inner confusion or conflict, is shown to be so imbalanced. The terrible heat has given way to a more balanced daytime which contains both sun and shadow, where "de gros nuages couraient d'un horizon à l'autre, couvraient d'ombre les maisons sur lesquelles retombait, après leur passage, la lumière froide et dorée du ciel de novembre"(255). The nights become cool and comforting as the whole town walks through the streets "et sentaient...le sol manquer sous leurs pas"(295). Rambert and the people of Oran have won. As Rieux, the narrator remarks, "ils savaient maintenant que s'il est une chose qu'on puisse désirer toujours et obtenir quelquefois, c'est la tendresse humaine"(322).

CHAPTER TWO -- THE LOSERS

While all three characters in the previous chapter achieve self-awareness and one achieves a measure of social involvement, many of the characters in these novels fail to do so. They remain alienated from society, nature and themselves through their inability or unwillingness to become fully conscious of self. Three of these make interesting subjects for this thesis: Faleasa Osovae from Pouliuli, Pepe from Leaves of the Banyan Tree, and Cottard from La Peste.

As in Sons for the Return Home, Wendt's second novel, Pouliuli, begins in the rain. The chief protagonist, Faleasa Osovae, is in the midst of making the most important decision of his life: he is deciding to go into voluntary exile. In western society this might be ignored or viewed as eccentricity; in the village society of Samoa it can only be seen as the act of a madman, a kind of living death. Faleasa's wife, Felefele, orders their aiga (Samoan extended family) "to go about their normal activities as if he wasn't there"(3). He has abdicated his leadership and power, and in a society where position and power are everything, this constitutes unmentionable moral transgression. It is a crime so serious that it can only stem from cowardice (and Faleasa is no coward), or insanity. Physical and

mental weakness in Samoan society are cruelly ridiculed as Faleasa's friend, club-footed Laaumatua, knows all too well. The verdict of most of the village council is that "he is being punished by the Almighty for his past"(13-14). Faleasa can't believe what he hears and dismisses the statement as "hypocritical excrement."

Faleasa is nauseated by the comfortable, successful life he has been living. He tries to isolate himself physically and emotionally from his family and society by vomiting at will anywhere, anytime, and by abusing all who try to help him. He tries also to isolate himself from Christian religion. As fat Filemoni, the village pastor, waddles up to the fale (Samoan house), his "white shirt and lavalava [wrap-around] gleamed in the light"(3). Watching him, Faleasa suffers another dizzy spell and is ill again.

Faleasa feels as if he is re-making himself, undergoing a rebirth, and he is quite giddy at the thought. He bitterly reflects that he has sacrificed his entire life in service to others, emptying himself of his youth and vitality in a useless cause. But, in an hour or two, he manages to completely alienate his wife, his family, the village and the pastor. Having successfully divested himself from society and God by lunchtime, he lies back on his mat gazing at the dome of the fale, musing that "it was extremely healing to contemplate the Void"(7). He feels as if his senses are heightened, as though he can see,

feel and think with his skin. When his family resorts to sending in a traditional healer, Faleasa pays the man off. Having now alienated himself from the faa-Samoa as well, Faleasa makes plans for the future.

His new position as non-person affords an excellent opportunity to play politics, setting one family faction against another. Submitting to a growing desire to "play God," Faleasa sets out to redress the ills of his society by exacting retribution on those he considers evil and rewarding those he considers useful. That evening, he symbolically puts out his hurricane lamp as he contemplates the destruction of the light (Pastor Filemoni) and the subsequent salvation of his friends from "the self-destroying ritual"(12). He welcomes the night and the sound of the surf. Here we witness a recess in a personal trial which ends in chaos. Faleasa has not embarked honestly on a quest for self-awareness. He persists in seeing himself as victim, or as avenging angel. When finally confronted with irrefutable proof of his own guilt, he becomes terrified of the night, withers before the heat of the sun, and lapses at last into true madness.

The novel is organized around a series of flashbacks, each of which is paired to an event current in Faleasa's life. It is in these plaguing memories that Faleasa's personal trial begins. Again and again his guilt is revealed to him, but he refuses to recognize that guilt

until it is too late.

All his life, Faleasa has welcomed the light of the white man, the light of Christian religion, the light of power. But he has never been completely comfortable with that light. He takes as friend and advisor, Laaumatua, a night person who himself has courted and received the benefit of the light. Fittingly, each of them was born into his diurnal opposite: Faleasa, "a healthy screaming child at night in the middle of a violent but short-lived thunderstorm"(19), and Laaumatua, whimpering "club-footed into the glaring, painful light of midday and the anger of his disgraced aiga"(19).

All his life, Faleasa knows that he has been rejecting a part of existence that is inescapable and feels a guilt that finally manifests in physical revulsion. As a child, he had admired and envied the first papalagi missionary to come to the village. Despite his discovery, that the missionary was not "as white as wave-foam, with hair the colour of bright sunshine, and curious brown spots, that looked like fly shit, all over [his body]"(41), Faleasa covets the "silver razor and hand-mirror that sparkled in the morning light"(43), and he is dazzled by the white clothes and "black shoes as shiny as wet river boulders"(44). But as he stares at the missionary, Faleasa can hear in the background, "the hissing of the surf slashing at the reef"(44).

On his first trip to Apia, as a child, Faleasa is entranced by the view of the city from a distance, "shimmering in the light," but in the "blistering sun"(47), his skin is badly burned. As Faleasa stares in disbelief at the shiny contraptions racing wildly along the Apia roadways, one of them "flashed past like an angry shark"(48). This is the first of many occasions where Faleasa feels as though he is in an alien world, yet it is a world he is determined to possess. Despite the fact that he is pursued by an oppressive heat "which seemed to shimmer up from the foundations of the town"(50), as the Samoan sun is "drowning in the mountains to the west"(52), Faleasa feels captivated by his first dazzling experience of electric light.

In his boyhood, Faleasa betrays not himself, but another. He meets an old man who is insane and who, after spending his early life in the service of others, and in trying to appropriate the papalagi myth for himself, one day admitted defeat and retreated into madness. From then on, he had wandered from place to place living on the charity of others, attempting to achieve some sort of harmony in his life by constructing stone circles in the middle of the night. When Faleasa first sees him, the circle-man is gazing straight into the fierce light of the noon-day sun, mouth open, "as if he was screaming in terrifying soundless pain"(98).

The old man fascinates Faleasa as the opposite of everything his own father represents. He is gentle, in touch with the land, a night person. Longing to be released from his father's autocratic power, young Faleasa dreams that the circle-man is his real father, who joyfully picks him up and releases "him up into air as soft as feathers, where he floated, wheeled, swam, and turned cartwheels in limitless, endless freedom"(100).

When Faleasa awakens, it is to rain and mist. His father, out of a belief that the old man's presence will ensure good harvests, has put Faleasa in charge of his welfare and the boy panics lest the strange circle-man has left, but finally Faleasa sees him "through a gap in the fale blinds, framed there like hope"(102). He willingly abandons himself to the mysterious power of the old man, but knows inside this is not the answer for him: he feels quite dizzy as though they were both "of the same sleepy harmony that was droning in his head"(107).

As the time draws near for the circle-man's departure, Faleasa becomes petulant; he feels that the old man is purposely abandonning him and persuades himself that he can live without love. He decides to destroy their relationship if he can. Nature, the last night of the old man's stay, reflects the violence of Faleasa's inner state:

> a quarter moon hung like a curved blade over
> the heads of the palms bordering the fale.
> Everything outside was the colour of melted

> lead, and under the trees, rooted into the sinews of the sleeping ground, shadows crouched and breathed and waited. (108)

Faleasa finds the old man completing his final circle, picks up the centre stone and throws it away. The circle-man, in agony, the symbol that gave meaning to his existence destroyed, leaves, never to return.

Another memory haunts Faleasa in his resistence to accept guilt. Still courting the light, as an adult, he and Laaumatua had enlisted the help of several Malaeluan men to work at a US army base. The American base soon serves as a ready supply of liquor, cash and pilfered articles. The villagers are corrupted by their contact with American values, and Faleasa feels he is to blame, but does nothing. In addition, the American sergeant under whom they work has become disoriented and anguished over the deaths of his fellow soldiers in the South Pacific. Neither Faleasa nor Laaumatua takes the time to realize the true cause of his despair, and so Laaumatua decides to supply him with women. Faleasa feels this too is wrong, but does not act. His conscience bothering him, Faleasa takes a walk on the beach. All nature seems out of harmony. Normally the beach and the gentle waves are soothing to him, but this night, the heat is oppressive and the moonlight turns everything "the colour of glistening lead"(60). The surf throbs and tugs at his hearing. He is fearful, as "the shadows seemed to be crouching, ready to pounce on

him"(60).

Before Faleasa, on the beach, are the sergeant, Laaumatua, and a woman. Faleasa immediately realizes their error in diagnosing the sergeant's problem as he watches the drunken man in "his self-destructive pain, his exhilerating dance in death's embrace"(61). Faleasa is nauseated as he recognizes the woman for a local prostitute; she stands naked in front of the sergeant, "the light like an unforgiving rash on her skin"(61). For years afterward, Faleasa feels fear and anger in Laaumatua's presence as though he is being accused "of a terrible crime he had committed or...[confronted with] a monstrous side of himself that he was too afraid to accept"(62).

Neither in remembering these key events of his life, nor in his private conversations with Laaumatua, will Faleasa accept his own guilt. After Faleasa has first feigned madness, he and Laaumatua meet in darkness in the church. Laaumatua reminds Faleasa that:

> the individual freedom you have discovered and now want to maintain is contrary to the very basis of our way of life....A good leader doesn't live for himself but for his people. And you, Faleasa, wanted the leadership. (17)

Nevertheless, Faleasa still believes he can leave the driver's seat, tinker with the broken coils and springs of his world, and return to his former position at will.

At first Faleasa's plotting involves only the succession to his aiga title. He is determined to install

his favourite son, Moaula, over his wife's favourite son, Elefane. He knows this is wrong, and as he watches the family bicker, he "inhaled the strong smell of decaying coral in the light breeze"(32). Even though he thinks he should be enjoying this spectacle, he isn't, so he goes fishing in order to forget the battle he has initiated. As with Meursault, nature soothes and refreshes Faleasa during these periodic recesses; he returns home having enjoyed "the sea's vast silence"(35). But he is once more entangled in the plot of his own making and, in a heavy rain three nights later, thinks "how for a frightened moment something in the cold clatter of the rain had tried to warn him"(39).

In his illusions of complete freedom, Faleasa still fails to see that he has only alienated himself from that part of society that was onerous to him and that he has never alienated himself from some parts at all. Although he refuses to perform the duties of a matai (titled head of an aiga), he still wishes to be fed and dressed like one and treated with due respect. Although he successfully plots to oust Pastor Filemoni, he immediately negotiates through Laaumatua for a replacement pastor. His confusion and lack of centre are evident while he and Laaumatua are walking through Faleasa's plantation. His world seems to liquify, as "a thick cover of cloud hid the sun, so it was pleasantly warm, with a slow breeze flowing like a sea of green plankton through the lush cacao trees

that were heavy with fruit"(63). As they sit down to a meal, it is Faleasa who says grace, while Laaumatua waits impatiently nearby. He sees no need for the Christian religion, though he has learned to live with it; Faleasa has so moulded his life on the light that he can neither live comfortably with it, nor without it. Later, while walking by the river, Faleasa frightens away a bird that has hovered freely above him in the sky. He is bothered by "the water...bristling with noonday sun and for a moment the flashing light stunned his eyes. But, as he tolerated the pain, he grew accustomed to the light"(68).

Though Faleasa continues to meddle, through Laaumatua, in the world he has chosen to abandon, the callous treatment meted out to him by his family is more than he can bear. He begins to feel trapped in the lie his life has become. He wanders out to spend time alone on the cliffs, thinking over the history of his village and remembering events from his own past. It is on one of these occasions that he remembers the myth of the lizard god, Pili, who had brought fire, tools and instruments of war to the people. When he had grown old, Pili abdicated his kingdom, dividing it among his children, who then reviled Pili, as Faleasa's children were now reviling him. Feeling betrayed, Pili leaped into Pouliuli, the goddess of darkness. Faleasa now understands that, by pretending insanity, he has done the same thing, but he still feels

this is the right decision: after all, he is the victim of his family's rapacity. It was "like being suspended in the core of a timeless sea, without a beginning or an end; and all was well"(98). Faleasa seems to have achieved harmony without the violent confrontation with death that was the case with Meursault.

However this apparent peace is deceptive and the last such moment Faleasa is to have. In a gesture of acceptance, Faleasa closes his eyes against the sun; it ceases to oppress him as he completely accepts his betrayal of the circle-man, of his family, the land, and himself. One more illusion of his life is stripped away during a trip to Apia where he discovers he has been duped by the very power he sought: the member of parliament he has helped to elect has been using him to collect personal gain.

Faleasa is filled with disgust as he moves through the Apia streets. The people smell of decay. The once shimmering town takes on a decidedly fishy odour. He "felt the layer of damp grime like the shiny skin of stingray under his bare feet"(129). He feels ill, but decides once more to try and correct his misshapen world. It is a mistake. The sun is now hidden from him by cloud; he sweats freely and gazes at "the weaving traffic, which reminded him of a panicking school of mullet being hunted by barracuda"(129), as his vanity brings him to betray the member of parliament.

On election day the sun is still muffled by a cloud that will only lift as night falls. Faleasa makes a show of complete sanity to the village in order to regain enough authority to unseat Malaga as member of parliament, and install Moaula. One last illusion leaves him; as he sings a hymn in church he realizes that he had used Christianity in order to give meaning to his life, but that "it was only one pattern of meaning; there were many others....Pouliuli would embrace him, give him meaning"(136).

But Faleasa's plans go awry. In a midnight confrontation, Moaula kills Malaga. Faleasa has lost control, betraying not just Malaga, but his favourite son as well, and he slips into genuine madness. Days later, Laaumatua finds him on the church steps in the same position as the circle-man, at noon, when there are no shadows, "arms outstretched to the dazzling sky, his mouth fixed in a soundless scream, his long hair and beard as brilliantly white as the whitewashed church walls"(144). No balance is possible. His self-awareness came incompletely and too late to save him from chaos.

Wendt's third novel, Leaves of the Banyan Tree contains, in its first and third chapters, the most powerful natural imagery of all his work. His earlier experiments with allegory have developed into a complex system underlying the epic tale of Tauilopepe, the Sapepe plantation owner. As in Camus' La Peste, the natural

imagery acts as a link between the allegorical and the literal, but unlike the imagery in La Peste, the imagery in Leaves remains keyed to the balance or imbalance in the emotional state of individual characters.

The novel details the public and personal trials of both Tauilopepe and his son, Pepe. Neither one of these characters succeeds, but the more enigmatic and troublesome of them is Pepe. This character has occupied Wendt for a number of years. His story is told in the second chapter of Leaves, but was first published in a novella contained in the collection, Flying Fox in a Freedom Tree (1974); there are echoes of Pepe as well in the short stories "A Cross of Soot," published in Flying-Fox, and "Tagata, the Man who Search for the Freedom Tree"(1963). Chapter Two accords the same function to natural imagery as in Wendt's two previous novels but, compared to the other chapters of the novel, it is less polished. There are several possible reasons for this variation in technique, but most likely is the subordination of the Pepe story as a whole to the epic movement of the plot, which centres on Tauilopepe, a sun figure.

Pepe, a child of darkness, is dominated all his life by his powerful father. Chapter One focusses on Tauilopepe's decision to embrace papalagi power and wealth, a decision which eventually destroys every member of his family. As Tauilopepe moves steadily toward the sun, Pepe recedes into the shadows. In the evenings in the fale,

Tauilopepe lights and sits by the only lamp so that he might read from the Bible. His irritation with himself, as he knows he is about to betray their way of life, is obvious: he snaps angrily at everyone, especially his favourite child, Pepe. Pepe repeatedly seeks security in the night outside the fale, only slipping in from the darkness to eat with his mother and sister.

Tauilopepe becomes completely involved in acquiring a papalagi-style plantation, emotionally abandonning his family. Pepe begins to spend time with the village tuua (senior orator), who teaches him Samoan myth and respect for the land. Pepe soon develops an intense hatred for his father and for the culture he tries to assimilate. However, sent early to a school in Apia, he loses his sense of belonging to the village life of Samoa. Although he retains a deep love for the tuua, Toasa, Pepe spends the rest of his life living in a native slum of Apia, alienated from both cultures, his family and himself.

The trials undergone by Pepe are clear. His transgressions against society are directed toward white society, in the person of his father. His personal trial is centred around the need to forgive his father and accept some guilt for his own acts, and his firm refusal to do this to the end.

Pepe's story begins and ends in fire. He has decided to write a death-bed autobiography as he gazes out the

window at the hospital crematorium. The hot sun burns toward his bed. He sees a fly, "hitting against the wire screen all the time, killing the self slowly"(157), just as Pepe himself has been doing for years. He insists that he has no regrets, but wakes in a sweat remembering the old men stoking the urn with "white parcels...guts, bits and pieces of people from the surgery department"(157). The heat buzzes in his ears as he prepares to record his life.

It is Tauilopepe who first takes Pepe to the Vaipe, "Dead-Water," the Apia slum where Samoan villagers move as a first step into papalagi society. Father and son leave the village as the sun is rising. It is hot in the bus and Pepe sleeps most of the way: this is Tauilopepe's dream for the future, not Pepe's. The Vaipe is truly a Land of the Shades for Pepe. In Samoan mythology, the waters of life, the Vaiola, is the stream in Paradise where Samoan chiefs bathe to regain their youth and vitality. The stream which flows past Pepe's home brings only decay and death, a living hell for Pepe where the "fale look like old men who are waiting to die"(162), and the imitations of papalagi houses, constructed by aspiring Samoans like Pepe's uncle, are so shiny, they scare Pepe. Across the stream is a prison. Tauilopepe has pulled Pepe away from the land and the night and left him in limbo with the other condemned men.

Thinking that if he were home right now, he would be

fishing, Pepe walks out to the middle of the pipe that serves as a bridge to the prison. "The stream is loaded with rubbish and shit and it stinks....I pick up a rock and break my face in the water with it"(164). This is only one of many occasions where Pepe either destroys his reflection, or fails to recognize himself in a mirror. As a child, trailing his father through Sapepe, he shattered "his reflection in all the puddles he could find"(22). And on his dying day, he staggers to the mirror in his hospital room, to find the man there "a stranger, and an ugly one at that. The skin hangs off his bones like clothes. The eyes have no laughter in the hollow sockets"(227-28). There is no reconciliation with self for Pepe.

Before the crushing power of his father, Pepe finds it impossible to act. Tauilopepe rapes the land, destroys the authority of the village tuua, abuses his daughters, perverts the music of the village story-teller to his own purposes, and undermines the health of his wife, Lupe. Pepe feels impotent, as he marks the slow progress of her death. Yet on the rare occasions he does challenge his father, as a youth, Pepe is not affected by the sun. When his sister, Niu, is being forced to marry a man older than Tauilopepe, Pepe rebels, smashes a plate, and storms off to his room to await his father. Although it is a hot day, Pepe records, "I don't feel the heat"(181).

However, as he grows older, Pepe finally discovers a way to punish Tauilo. Late on a Sunday night, Pepe gathers twelve disciples behind Tauilo's store. The night is Pepe's medium and at first he feels "invisible and powerful." While one group of boys sets fire to the Protestant church hall, Pepe and other friends break into Tauilo's store to steal what they can. Despite his fear, Pepe tries to convince himself he is justified in this act of destruction and betrayal. He notes, "There are stars in the sky. Tomorrow will be fine"(191). But, as he races away from the police, the headlights of their cars and a few streetlamps catch him. He dives into shadow too late, "the night-watchman sees [him] plain as sunlight"(192).

Pepe knows he has been recognized and so gives himself some breathing space by diving into the sea and swimming out to the buoy where he looks back at all the destruction he has caused, knowing he has ruined his position in society as well. Heat and cold, light and dark swirl chaotically around him:

> The buoy rises up and down under me. My teeth chatter. The lights of the town are all on. At one end the Protestant hall is burning quickly to the ground, with a large crowd and helpless firemen watching it. The wind hits me with the cold, and the stars are laughing in the sky. Fear freezes me when I remember the night-watchman. (192)

The next day Pepe laughs his defiance at his father's discomfiture while he confesses to the police. It is the laughter of self-destruction.

For a time, Pepe has successfully challenged the sun and he is clearly in control thoughout the questioning and the trial. This episode in the novel is modelled on the trial of Meursault (Beston 1977,157), but the sun does not oppress Pepe, who is neither confused about his own values, nor is he courting the dominant society. The questioning takes place on a hot day, yet it is the police who are sweating. When Pepe in convicted, it is for atheism, not arson or theft. His back to the window, in front of the Black-Dress who makes him swear on the Black Book, proclaiming that the papalagi had brought the Light, Pepe declares, "I have the darkness and myself"(201). Pepe accepts his four year sentence without a word; he is still playing a game, goading the gods, the trickster flirting with destruction.

However, the death of Toasa changes everything. His mother and sisters lost to him forever, Pepe now has no one to love -- only Tauilo to hate. Pepe has made Toasa the centre of his life as the Samoan's grandfather had done in his marriage, as Faleasa had done with the circle-man. His reaction to Toasa's death is one of complete despair. "He is dead, the Banyan Tree, and I am the shell that will walk the earth like the shadowless noon"(203). Guilt at his neglect of Toasa wells up as "the sun presses down on [his] head"(203). Pepe has abandonned Toasa to die alone at the mercy of Tauilopepe. This guilt manifests as fire. He

walks into the fale toward the bier, his "body burning inside like the stones under [his] feet"(204). After the funeral, alone in his room at night, Pepe feels he is in prison; gradually he builds up the courage to "believe, without hate or regret, that [he has] nothing, nothing, now that Toasa is dead"(206). And Pepe manages to live for several years in a recess of apparent harmony, not seeing his father, but not opposing him either. There is no elemental imagery attached to the Pepe character during this section of the narrative.

The remaining years of Pepe's life provide him with a measure of love, but slowly each person he loves is taken from him and he is left again with only Tauilopepe. As Pepe lies dying in hospital of TB, he dreams of the peace of the lava fields and resigns himself to death, but he never reconciles with his father, nor with society. This is quite clear from the final scenes in his hospital room. His friend Simi visits him and asks, "You have no regrets about how you spent your life? About what you chose?"(186). Pepe looks away and after Simi leaves, he awakens to find the night forever invaded by light and fire. Beside him was:

> only the night nurse in her white uniform without a smile on her face. From the window comes the smell of the fire and the burning flesh. Through the windows I watch the mountains disappear, like Simi, into the night-time. (186)

Pepe can never forget what he has lost and can never forgive. Yet his daily refusal to see his father occurs in a room "so hot it is hard to breathe"(227), and is juxtaposed to his daily pre-occupation with the sight of the two old men stoking the fire on the hill. Pepe claims to have found a measure of peace, but "all is [not] well in lava" -- he has refused to face the one alienating force that has driven him all his life; he has refused to love his father and ultimately refused to accept his own guilt.

Although Pepe committed arson in order to hurt his father's pride and Meursault committed murder in a confusion between value systems, Cottard, from La Peste, is the only true criminal of the six characters examined in this thesis. He is outside the law and society from the beginning of the narrative to the end, accused of some serious crime that will result in a long imprisonment.

If there is one character in the novel who represents chaos to counterbalance the harmony sought for by Rambert, it is Cottard, who is evil, just as the plague is evil. And the character can certainly be regarded allegorically. Cottard's rise and fall from power is directly linked to the career of the plague itself, and in direct opposition to the natural imagery correspondances established by Camus for the rest of Oran's inhabitants. However, in this opposition, by one obviously evil character, Camus reinforces the system which operates so consistently

throughout the rest of the novel. Cottard is a day person who must hide in the night for protection from the light of society's laws. As Oran bakes in the sun, Cottard lives quietly in the dark among its people like the evil living in the heart of man. He is equated repeatedly with the plague itself. Tarrou remarks that "chacun la porte en soi, la peste, parce que personne, non, personne au monde n'en est indemne"(274). If men are not constantly vigilant, says Tarrou, the evil in them will overpower the good and erupt like the plague.

Cottard, then, grows stronger and more self-confident as the plague intensifies, unaffected by the natural imbalance of the elements. When Rieux first visits him, in the shadows of his room, the doctor hears the squeal of rats in the corner of the apartment although the plague-infested rats were all thought to have died. A few days after the town has been closed, Cottard meets the doctor again, and Rieux notes this time that Cottard glories in the plague and the sun, just as the other inhabitants retreat from both. Tarrou adds that not only does Cottard seem to revel in the strength of the plague, he seems to be in league with it: "c'est un complice...qui se délecte"(115). As the plague visibly begins to abate, Cottard shrinks back into himself, slinks about in the dark once more, is morose and sullen. When Tarrou tells him that the plague may not have changed the outer habits of the people,

but may have changed their hearts, Cottard snaps that "il ne s'intéressait pas au coeur et que même le coeur était le dernier de ses soucis"(301). The end of the plague is, allegorically, the end for Cottard. The authorities will soon come for him as surely as the plague took its victims. Cottard cannot exist when the good overpowers evil, and he loses his sanity.

Although the allegorical Cottard is easily available to us, there is some depth to the character which manifests in his failure to embark on a personal trial. We learn that the fear of exile governs Cottard's existence. His terror at the thought of enforced confinement results in extremes of physical imbalance like his attempted suicide and later insanity. So strong is his desire to maintain human contact that, even in his suicidal despair, he has scrawled in red ink on his door, "Entrez, je suis pendu"(29). His neighbour, Grand, remarks to Dr. Rieux that before the suicide attempt he had noticed that Cottard always wanted to start up conversations with him.

Cottard never allows himself to embark on the inner quest that resulted in harmony for the Samoan, Meursault and Rambert. His concern remains for the external appearance of harmony, something he hopes to achieve through flattery and bribes. Consequently, he never demonstrates love or responsibility toward others. He has no intention of assisting the beleaguered sanitary crews,

not because he is afraid of contagion, but because the eradication of plague is dangerous to his freedom. Nevertheless, he still wants to retain the good will of Tarrou and Rieux. When Tarrou offers him the chance to serve his fellows on one of these crews, Cottard, "tournait son chapeau entre ses mains, leva vers Tarrou un regard incertain," and says, "Il ne faut pas m'en vouloir"(176). And so, in the end, without the strength of self-awareness, and alienated from nature and society, all that is left Cottard in the face of the Void, is death or insanity.

As with all these characters, the validity of the official trial is undermined, or the entire procedure understated. The reader is never informed in La Peste just what Cottard's crime was, except that it was serious and not murder. Yet the official response to his hysterical resistance to arrest is presented as needlessly violent. Lines of police appear, revolvers bristle from every doorway, two machine guns blast the window of his apartment. When the police finally lead the madman away screaming, Rieux sees one policeman disinterestedly punch Cottard twice in the face, hard.

The progress of Cottard's trials, then, parallels that of the other characters in this chapter. He is treated inappropriately by the justice system of society and he fails completely to achieve self-awareness. Balance is impossible. The difference between Cottard and all the

other characters discussed in this thesis is that his relationship with the natural elements is directly inverse to the pattern established in the novels examined. The importance of this exception is that it occurs in a novel where group relations are emphasized. Therefore, the stark isolation of a clearly evil character from the group experience serves to legitimize Camus' thesis that social responsibility is the next logical step after self-awareness.

CONCLUSION

In Leaves of the Banyan Tree, Albert Wendt performs the unusual conjuring trick of producing a new and powerful character near the end of the narrative. Galupo, an allegorical figure of reconciliation, rides into town at high noon like the marshall come to clean up Dodge City: his trusty steed -- the Apia to Sapepe bus; his weapons -- a suitcase full of books. Galupo's selection is a revealing one:

> He kept the Bible he had stolen from the Protestant church, Camus' Myth of Sisyphus and The Plague, a paperback copy of Frazer's Golden Bough, Dostoevsky's Idiot and Crime and Punishment, an unexpurgated edition of Lady Chatterley's Lover, a collection of pornographic Japanese prints, Dreiser's American Tragedy, Norman Mailer's The Naked and the Dead, V.S. Naipaul's A House for Mr. Biswas, Luis Borges's Ficciones, and ten volumes of the Encyclopaedia Britannica. (366)

The Galupo character points to possibilities for a new Samoa, a synthesis of all the contending forces in its past and present: the imposed, the indigenous; the sacred, the secular; the individual, the communal. From his former library, Galupo has carefully chosen the books that define him and has burned the rest. He claims he has created himself, assumed total responsibility for his own existence. Now he has come to Sapepe to re-unite the people and restore the wasteland.

Galupo's name means "night-wave," but he cannot be

called a night person, as he exists with equal ease during the day. In fact, he deposes the sun-figure, Tauilopepe, to become the most powerful leader in the village. Galupo is the latest and one of the clearest representations in Wendt of the need for the individual to become self-aware, achieve harmony with nature, and assume leadership in the community.

Although no detailed studies of the imagery in Wendt's work exist, the tendency in his fiction toward the establishment of balance has been noted by W.D. Ashcroft in his article, "The Place of the Spirit." Ashcroft claims the swing in the narration in Sons for the Return Home between past and present is meant to display a consciousness torn between two cultures. This technique forces the reader to adopt the stance of a fundamentally disoriented consciousness. And Subramani has described Leaves as a novel where balance is achieved between the mimetic and allegorical. He says the novel ultimately becomes a "half-historical and half-mythological diagnosis of the spiritual malaise of a culture"(137), and that, "ideologically what Galupo exemplifies is the possibility of synthesis of individual freedom and corporate responsibility"(142).

The same tendency towards establishing balance has been noted by critics of Camus. H.M. Block claims that all Camus' work shows a quest for primal self. In a godless universe, the individual must assume total responsibility

for his own existence. This quest is intimately associated with a sense of oneness with nature and precedes the possibility of the individual to act in communion with others (81). Tom Bishop states that the absence or excess of one element or another in nature, in Camus' fiction, can be destructive. Real happiness is associated with a balance of the elements (65).

Not only is the notion of balance a key element in Camus' work, the connection between balance in man and balance in nature is a clear one. Anna Balakian has shown there is a strong correlation between the internal states of Camus' characters and the natural imagery. She claims that the natural settings in Camus are sensitized, not personalized, that Camus still maintains the inhuman character of nature itself. For Balakian, Camus uses nature as an indicator of inner states, and as a forecaster of events. Consequently, it is a mistake to assign steady correspondances between landscape and inscape. According to Balakian, the sun, sea, wind and desert have ambiguous values that change from one work to another, their only constant being the functions of gauging and forecasting (39).

In taking this position, Balakian runs counter to most of the work that has been done on Camus' imagery. Detailed studies like Laurent Mailhot's Albert Camus, ou l'Image du désert and Jean Gassin's L'Univers symbolique d'Albert Camus

have assigned specific symbolic values for the natural imagery. The major difficulty encountered by these traditional approaches is in accounting for the widely divergent aspects of nature displayed in Camus, aspects ranging from the benevolent to the malevolent, and which often vary from work to work. The sun, for example, has been descibed by these critics and others as a symbol for fertility, death, an invincible foe, society, and a father figure -- a confusing collection of attributes. As Balakian has shown, it is probably more revealing to discuss the function of the imagery than to assign specific values, as the imagery seems to follow a functional pattern from work to work, from geographical setting to geographical setting.

A similar connection between inner states and natural imagery has been posited by Roger Robinson for Wendt. Robinson writes that the Samoan environment becomes a "correlative to the moral or mental state of his characters"(280), and then details some of the metaphoric equivalences established by Wendt for such elements as coral, sun and sea. Here Robinson falls into the same trap as many of Camus' critics. The correlation between man's inner state and nature definitely exists in Wendt, but the critic who tries to assign specific values to the elemental imagery will be forced to deal with each novel separately, or simply to catalogue a list of positive and negative aspects of each element.

It is true that earlier in this thesis I have also ascribed certain general values to night and day. In both authors, the inquiring individual, the individual who is closest to his inner self, is the one who most readily inhabits the night. The individual who is most alienated from self is the one who inhabits the day. And in both Wendt and Camus, night and day assume the equivalence of internal and external existence which must be brought to balance. These are, however, only the most general values for those phenomena and remain constant in work after work. Furthermore, they are directly linked to the overwhelming movement from chaos to harmony, imbalance to balance in these authors.

While Balakian has correctly placed the focus on function, I believe that focus is not clearly enough sighted to the primacy of individual experience in Camus. As was shown earlier in this essay, the balance or imbalance in nature not only reflects the inner state of the character, but is really an individual perception of that character. Pepe, for example, is the only character who is overwhelmed by the sun in his hospital room; the nurse, dressed in cool white, and the papalagi doctor, are not affected in the same way as Pepe is. The sun oppresses Meursault only on those days when he is upset and confused, while other characters either revel in its brilliance or are merely inconvenienced by its heat. The two storms in

La Peste take place only during the sermon of Father Paneloux when the people are being castigated for moral laxity. These instances, among others, establish a certain ordering of events where the disturbed emotional state of the characters either precedes or occurs concurrently with the natural imbalance. Nature in both authors is indifferent; it does not act independently to afflict mankind: it simply is. Nature, consequently, does not act as a forecaster of events; to say that it does, obviates the whole claim to the primacy of individual experience. Therefore, although I agree with Balakian's claim for the barometric function of the natural imagery, I find her claim for its forecasting abilities a disturbing inconsistency that prejudices her original contention.

The approach taken to the study of any piece of fiction leads the critic inexorably to conclusions contingent on the assumptions of the approach itself. The number of conflicting opinions extant on the guilt or innocence, success or failure of Camus' or Wendt's characters is testimony to the truth of this observation. As mentioned above, Margaret Nightingale, looking at Wendt's fiction as a dialectic of opposing sets of values, sees Pepe as a failed character since he opposes one set of values without in turn setting up his own. And Denis Hulston regards Pepe as a success, from an existential point of view, because he becomes his own judge. I have already

pointed out that René Andrienne feels Meursault is pursued and affected by external forces, and is therefore a condemned innocent. However, David Saint-Amour, writing from the point of view of the Oedipal myth in his article, "Underground with Meursault: Myth and Archetype in Camus' L'Etranger," claims that Meursault represents everyman, suffering and struggling, both innocent and guilty.

The position which claims that the work of Camus and Wendt is organized on the principal of balance also has its assumptions and implications. It assumes that imbalance exists and tries to posit reasons for that imbalance; it assumes that balance is a possible and desirable goal for the characters which can be discovered in the text thematically or stylistically; it assumes that the agent for affecting the movement from imbalance to balance is human rather than supernatural; and it therefore assumes that failure or success in achieving balance devolves upon the individual character himself.

In analyzing such aspects of the work as theme, structure, imagery, dialogue, syntax, and so on, the critic who assumes this pattern of balance will inevitably conclude that the uneven juxtaposition of antithetical concepts, events, images, etc. represents this struggle between polarities, and that the even juxtaposition represents some sort of stasis. For instance, when Meursault is out of balance the sun oppresses him, but he

finds no solace in the night. Yet when he is in balance, he can inhabit both worlds equally. On the moral plane, this can be translated into the statement that Meursault is both innocent and guilty. The further possibility of synthesis or fusion into one individual of these opposing forces may be a final step in the achievement of balance, but not a necessary one. For example, the Samoan remains balanced between earth and sky at the end of Sons for the Return Home, while Meursault of L'Etranger welcomes some sort of internal fusion with the starry night.

In many respects, then, the approach taken in this thesis is as valid (or as invalid) as many others, but it has been chosen for one particular reason. It is global enough in its scope to accomodate a number of works by the authors in question; consequently, it can demonstrate a consistent trend in the functioning of the imagery which is not at first apparent in a more piecemeal approach. Its implications for the interpretation of problematic characters like Pepe and Meursault has already been shown. In addition, the focus on balance and imbalance provides a new perspective on the trial motif in both authors which has not been adequately explored before. The notion that the character must undergo a personal trial in contrast to the public trial falls naturally within the purvue of balance, but not necessarily within that of other approaches -- the psychological or sociological, for example.

Finally, the position which claims that the character is ultimately responsible for restoring order to his own world seems to accord with much of the Camus and Wendt criticism. Bill Pearson claims that in Wendt's fiction, if God is dead, so are the gods, and that the task of the individual character is not one of revenge or retribution, but of restoring some sort of balance between his inner and outer worlds (170). H.M. Block writes that Camus' work represents a quest for meaningful values in a world of spiritual aridity and emptiness. Camus "proclaimed with fervent intensity the dignity of individual freedom and the exaltation of life. His work is a sustained repudiation of nihilism and despair, an affirmation of the power of man to achieve spiritual regeneration and that measure of salvation possible in an absurd universe"(71). The fictional characters discussed in this thesis -- the Samoan, Meursault, Rambert, Faleasa, Pepe and Cottard -- represent the fundamental importance of that struggle, its pitfalls, and its pleasures.

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